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DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: June 27, 2007

Solution on Eurofighters

1. Defense Minister Norbert Darabos of the Social Democrats has reached an agreement with Eurofighter producer EADS: The corporation will deliver only 15 instead of the planned 18 interceptor jets to Austria - a deal that will save the country up to 400 million Euros, Darabos says. It is not clear whether the SPOe's coalition partner OeVP is going to back the agreement. The Conservatives have said they want to look into the Defense Minister's package deal first. The opposition parties BZOe, FPOe and the Greens have massively criticized the agreement with EADS. Like all Austrian media, mass-circulation daily Kurier reports on the solution in the dispute over the Eurofighter jets for Austria's armed forces, pointing out that the savings of about 400 million Euros as announced by Defense Minister Norbert Darabos will result both from a reduction to 15 of the number of jets to be purchased and from the fact that Austria will receive six used interceptors. The OeVP has criticized the solution as a "sham package," adding that it will take a close look at Darabos' agreement with EADS before deciding on whether to back the deal. After all, the Kurier explains, the Defense Minister had gone ahead and concluded the deal without having first secured OeVP's support. Although he would prefer OeVP's backing, it is not vital for the agreement, Darabos said, emphasizing he would also "go it alone" should the Conservatives decide not to support the solution. According to ORF online news, the opposition parties have harshly criticized Darabos' move. The FPOe accused Darabos of having concluded a "horse trade" with EADS, the BZOe meanwhile complained that the Social Democrats had broken yet another election campaign promise, and the Greens are criticizing the fact that the Minister acted without waiting for the publication of the parliamentary investigative committee's findings on the Eurofighter purchase.

Town Signs: Struggle for a Solution

2. Joerg Haider, the governor of the province of Carinthia, met with Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer on Tuesday evening to discuss the ongoing dispute over bilingual town signs. On Monday, Haider had rejected a plan put forward by the Chancellor, which calls for 163 bilingual signs to be put up, saying he will accept no more than 102 signs, 11 more than those in place now. In the dispute over bilingual town signs, Carinthian governor Joerg Haider rejected a plan put forward by Chancellor Gusenbauer earlier this week, accusing the Chancellor of piking towns according to their political affiliations. Following consultations with mayors in his province earlier on Tuesday, Haider also warned that no local

official from his provincial administration would put up the signs if the government in Vienna sought to force a solution, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung says. The SPO's coalition partner OeVP has meanwhile said it also opposes Gusenbauer's plan. Haider and Gusenbauer say they plan to hold further talks, after the Carinthian governor stressed on Monday that he would call new provincial elections if Gusenbauer's plan was accepted by Parliament's constitutional committee. Austria's Constitutional Court ruled six years ago that all towns and villages with a Slovenian minority of more than 10 percent must have bilingual signs, a ruling that Haider continues to defy. The question originally goes back to the 1955 State Treaty which says Slovenians and Croats in Carinthia, Burgenland and Styria have minority rights. Article 7 calls for the dual language signs. Despite the ongoing struggle, there are reports a solution to the long running dispute could be in place during the summer, the daily concludes.

Brown Succeeds Blair as Prime Minister

13. Tony Blair is stepping down as British Prime Minister today after ten years in office, handing the job over to the new Labour Party leader Gordon Brown. US President George Bush has paid tribute to his close ally in a British newspaper, describing Blair as very talented and saying their partnership had been one of equals. Tony Blair is meanwhile expected to be confirmed as the new international envoy to the Middle East.

Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung in an analysis of what to expect from Gordon Brown as Britain's new Prime Minister says that "on the foreign policy front, a departure from Blair's strategy is unlikely." However, Brown may be more "flexible" than Blair in his interpretation of "stability" for Iraq; and his military advisors might propose a quick troop pullout from Iraq in order to prevent overburdening the British army. Meanwhile, the daily continues, the nomination of Tony Blair as the new international envoy for the Middle East has been received with skepticism from several countries, particularly Russia. Hamas, too, has emphasized the Palestinian people's "bad experience with Blair." Liberal daily Der Standard writes that the Middle East Quartet is banking on Blair to make progress on resolving the Palestinian crisis, although the daily suggests that the former British Premier's lasting support for US President Bush's Iraq policy could prove to be a stumbling block. In an interview with mass-circulation tabloid Oesterreich, Austrian political analyst Anton Pelinka, however, argues that it would be "wrong to reduce Blair to the Iraq war." He believes that Blair "has been underestimated," because after all, "where the economy is concerned, he pushed Britain to the top of the major EU countries." His negative record is tied to his orientation on the foreign policy front, Pelinka says: "It is important to confront him with that, but there's more to Tony Blair than just Iraq." The former British Premier "put ecological and humanitarian issues high on his agenda," the analyst explains.

US to Tighten Immigration Procedures

14. Austrian media reported on Tuesday that the United States is planning to further tighten immigration procedures for visitors from Visa Waiver (VWP) countries. As of next year, travelers will have ten instead of two finger scans taken upon arrival in the US. Several major US airports are expected to be launching trial periods of the extended finger scanning procedure starting in fall. Other potential measures include online questionnaires to be completed by VWP country nationals several weeks before their planned trip to the United States.

Like several Austrian media, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung reports on US plans to further tighten immigration procedures for Visa Waiver travelers and visa holders from European countries. A pilot project is to be launched at ten US airports this year, requiring visitors to the US from the countries in question to have ten finger scans taken. Future measures could also include a check of additional biometric data, such as retina scans, the Wiener Zeitung quotes Deputy Director for Homeland Security P.T. Wright. The data received is to be checked against the Homeland Security Department and other official institutions' watch lists; the FBI and the CIA will also be given access to the data, according to the daily. Congress is meanwhile debating yet another potential measure: In the future, all European travelers to the US may be

required to enter their travel plans into an online data base 48
hours prior to their departure at the latest.
McCaw